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Atari Online News, Etc.
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->From the Editor's Keyboard

"Saying it like it is!"

Well, another year is coming to a close in a few days. It's going to be a year that I'll be glad to see end, for a number of reasons!

I hope that your holidays were enjoyable. For us, we spent the holiday with family and had a nice celebration. Hopefully, your holiday time was equally enjoyable. We hope that you'll all ring in the new year with a lot of fun, but please do so safely; we want you all to be around for the new year - Happy New Year, 2014!

Until next time...

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - More Evidence Suggests PS4 Is Winning The Console Wars!

NY Man's 10,607 Video Games Secure Guinness Title!
Atari and Other Old Consoles Come to Your Browser!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!

More Evidence Suggests PS4 Is Winning The Console Wars

We're still very early in the game and the Xbox One has a lot going for it that could help it trounce the PlayStation 4 over the long haul. However, in these early stages we've seen several bits of evidence that all point

to Sony's PlayStation 4 having a slight but persistent lead in its battle against Microsoft and the Xbox One. And now we have two more data nuggets that seem to show that the PS4 is maintaining its slight early edge in the console wars heading into 2014.

First, Benzinga reports that a poll of readers conducted earlier this month shows that more would prefer to get a PlayStation 4 for Christmas this year (41.2%) than would prefer to get an Xbox One (37.3%). While this is obviously just one survey, its results line up with other data we've seen such as Google's recent report showing that the PS4 generated slightly more search traffic this year than the Xbox One and also sales figures that show PS4 sales are pacing just slightly ahead of Xbox One sales.

Our second tidbit comes to us from Ars Technica, which notes that the PS4 is now outselling the Xbox One on eBay by a margin of two-to-one. This isn't as clear-cut a win for Sony, however, because strong eBay sales could simply be a reflection of more constrained PS4 supplies that have made the console harder to find than the Xbox One so far.

Feeling Nostalgic? Atari and Other Old Consoles Come to Your Browser

Plenty of PlayStation 4s and Xbox Ones were unwrapped this year around the Christmas tree, but 30 years ago it was the parents doing the unwrapping to reveal a shiny new Atari 7800 or ColecoVision. And now the Internet Archive lets you play games on those old-school consoles right in your browser.

Announced in a blog post at Archive.org on Thursday, the new Web-based console emulators are still in an early stage. An emulator is a kind of "virtual machine" that lets the data normally stored on cartridges or disks—their "read-only memory," or ROM—to be run as if it were on the console itself.

Included are the Atari 2600, Atari 7800, ColecoVision, Magnavox Odyssey2 and the AstroCade. There are dozens if not hundreds of games available for each one; some may technically still be the property of one company or another, but there aren't many people buying Atari cartridges these days, so the publishers of these old games often allow them to be distributed for free.

The Web-based emulator is a work in progress: Some games have bugs, others don't run at all, and sound hasn't been implemented yet (those bleep-bloop sounds are half the fun). But you can still relive the first few screens of "Pitfall" or try to survive a few minutes of "Asteroids." No downloads, no configuration, no nothing.

Nevertheless, the holidays are often a time of nostalgia, and this may be a good opportunity to show the next generation that their parents were gamers, too—though they'll soon find things were much different back then.

If you'd like the capability to play these games without a browser, you can download MESS, a multiple-system emulator for old consoles like the Atari series, or search for other emulators of your favorite old consoles.

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->A-ONE Gaming Online - Online Users Growl & Purr!

NY Man's 10,607 Video Games Secure Guinness Title

Maybe it was getting his first video game, *Cosmic Avenger*, for Christmas at age 12, and then having to wait an entire year for the hard-to-find Colecovision console to play it on that made Michael Thomasson so determined to get his hands on every video game and system he could find.

Now, 31 years and roughly 11,000 games later, Thomasson is the newly crowned world record holder for having the largest collection of video games. He is featured in a two-page spread in the just-released "Guinness World Records 2014 Gamer's Edition."

"I have games on cartridge, laser disc. I have VHS-based games, cassette-based games," Thomasson said, standing among the collection that fills the basement of his suburban Buffalo home.

Along with the games, he has the devices to play them on, not only the Xboxes and PlayStations but obscure ones like the Casio Loopy, the only game system specifically geared toward girls, which came out in Japan in 1995, and the Pippin, a dud released by Apple the same year.

"Every game on it is awful," Thomasson says of Apple's foray into the gaming world. "It's the least fun of anything in the house."

At the other end of the spectrum is the old Colecovision unit like the one that appeared under the Christmas tree one year after his grandparents gave him his first game for it. They had mistakenly believed his parents had gotten their hands on the playing system, which was a hot item that year. It stands to this day as the best present his parents ever gave him.

"It's my first love so it's sentimental," Thomasson said. But the games also were quality, with very little of the "shovelware" mediocre, rushed releases typical of many systems, he said.

"They looked good, they played good. For the time they sounded good," he said, "for the bleeps and blips of the 80s."

Thomasson began collecting almost immediately, he said, but the path to the world record had a couple of restarts. He sold off his collection twice, first in 1989 to raise money for a Sega Genesis, then again to pay for his 1998 wedding. ("I was heavy into collecting when we married so she knew what she was getting into," he says of his wife, JoAnn.)

Since then, Thomasson has methodically rebuilt the collection, averaging two games per day on a strict \$3,000-a-year budget which means never paying full price.

He estimates the collection is worth \$700,000 to \$800,000.

He hasn't played every game. The father of a 5-year-old, Anna, Thomasson designs games and teaches 2D animation, game design and the history of video games at Canisius College in Buffalo. He also writes on the topic for magazines and books.

"I probably get three hours of playing in a week," he said. "If I'm lucky."

Guinness lists the number of games in Thomasson's record-breaking collection at 10,607, though he said the number exceeds 11,000 now, a year after the official count and after discovering forgotten stashes of games after the counting crew left.

Either way, it bested the previous record holder, Richard Lecce, who held the record first recorded in 2010 with 8,616 games.

"My congratulations to a fellow collector," Lecce, 39, said by phone from his Florida home upon hearing his record had fallen. "It's very impressive and I'm very happy for him."

Lecce began collecting as a way to own all the games he couldn't have as a kid, he said, and grew to appreciate their place in pop culture.

Still an active collector, Lecce hasn't counted his games in the last few years and doesn't know what his number has grown to, but he has no immediate plans to challenge Thomasson for his old record.

"It's something I did for my own enjoyment. I applied for the Guinness book for my kids so that years from now they can look back and say, wow, my father was in the 'Guinness Book of World Records,'" Lecce, a father of two and numismatist, a rare coin dealer, said.

He's happy to see more people collecting, and appreciating, video games.

"Everything from the original artwork to the actual code that was written for the games to the actual box art and the whole marketing plan," he said. "It's just a very undervalued and underappreciated art form."

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

NORAD Tracks Santa Logs 19.58 Million Web Visits

The North American Aerospace Defense Command's Santa-tracking program logged 19.58 million unique visitors to its website on Christmas Eve.

NORAD said Thursday that volunteers answered 117,371 calls from children seeking information on the jolly old elf's whereabouts. First lady

Michelle Obama was among the program's 1,200 volunteers.

An additional 146,307 followed Santa's progress on Twitter. The program also got 1.45 million "likes" on Facebook.

Those numbers are up from last year when volunteers answered 114,000 phone calls from around the world. The website had 22.3 million unique visitors. NORAD Tracks Santa had 1.2 million followers on Facebook and 129,000 on Twitter.

The Christmas tradition of tracking Santa began in 1955 when a local newspaper advertisement invited children to call Santa but mistakenly listed the hotline of NORAD's predecessor.

5 Things To Know About Tracking Santa's Journey

For kids who can't wait for Santa to arrive, the North American Aerospace Defense Command has a Christmas treat. Visions of sugar plums can be augmented by a check on the fabled fat man's progress around the globe on Christmas Eve. Here are five things to know about the holiday tradition called NORAD Tracks Santa:

1. HOW DO YOU FOLLOW SANTA'S PATH?

NORAD provides updates by phone, Facebook, Twitter and email. If you call 877-HI-NORAD, an operator will give you an update. Online: <http://www.noradsanta.org>. Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/noradsanta>. Twitter: @NoradSanta. Email: noradtrackssanta@outlook.com. Smartphone apps also are available at app stores.

NORAD's Santa operations center opened at 6 a.m. EST on Dec. 24 and has received tens of thousands of calls from around the world. This year, Santa's first stop after leaving the North Pole was Novoye Chaplino, Russia, NORAD said. The Canadian naval ship Regina reported seeing Santa on its radar near the Arabian Sea. Santa usually ends his trip in North America and South America. "Santa calls the shots," NORAD says on its website. "We just track him!"

2. HOW MANY PEOPLE FOLLOW SANTA?

Last year, volunteers answered 114,000 phone calls from around the world. The website had 22.3 million unique visitors. NORAD Tracks Santa had 1.2 million followers on Facebook and 129,000 on Twitter.

Among the questions kids have had on their minds when they called in previous years:

"Am I on the nice list or the naughty list?"

"Can you put my brother on the naughty list?"

"Are you an elf?"

"How much to adopt one of Santa's reindeer?"

3. WHY DOES NORAD DO IT?

In 1955, a local newspaper advertisement invited children to call Santa but mistakenly listed the hotline of NORAD's predecessor. Rather than disappoint the kids, commanders told them they indeed knew where Santa was. NORAD, a U.S.-Canadian operation based at Peterson Air Force Base in Colorado Springs, Colo., continues the tradition every Christmas Eve.

4. WHY WAS THERE CONTROVERSY THIS YEAR?

A children's advocacy group complained that an animated video on the NORAD Tracks Santa website injected militarism into Christmas by showing fighter jets escorting Santa's sleigh on a 39-second video promoting the event. NORAD says the fighter escort is nothing new. NORAD began depicting jets accompanying Santa and his reindeer in the 1960s.

5. HOW DOES NORAD TRACK SANTA?

Using the same satellites it uses to track missiles, NORAD says it is able to detect heat signatures from Rudolph's nose.

High-Tech Santa: 5 Devices To Give Old St. Nick A Boost

Every year, the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) tracks Santa Claus' location on Christmas Eve, to the delight of millions who visit the military's website that night.

If a high-tech military operation can track Santa, couldn't technology also give the jolly old elf a hand in finishing his rounds? After all, Santa isn't getting any younger, and Christmas Eve isn't getting any longer.

So what should be on Santa's wish list this year to help him guide his sleigh from the North Pole and get presents to all the good girls and boys of the world? Here are a few suggestions. (Note: LiveScience is not being paid to promote these products. We're simply concerned for Santa's well-being.)

1. A 3D printer

Manufacturing is a tough business, what with outsourcing, supply problems and the cost of labor. Perhaps Santa's elves could stay competitive if they caught up with the 3D-printing craze. Desktop 3D printers for home use are just coming on the market, and they're capable of turning digital instructions into 3D gizmos. Santa and his elves could even move beyond plastic as a material with a new, open-source 3D metal printer that costs less than \$1,200, compared with \$500,000 for a commercial device.

2. An updated naughty/nice list.

Parchment and paper are so 20th century. Santa needs something a bit snazzier — perhaps a tablet? LAPTOP magazine's Avram Piltch suggests Samsung's Galaxy Note 10.1. It comes with a pen and note-taking applications, so Santa won't have to take off his gloves to swipe at the screen (nor will he have to worry about tablet typing with chubby fingers). The tablet allows users to open two apps at once, so Santa can keep his naughty/nice list open while consulting Google Maps for directions to his next stop.

3. High-tech gloves

Santa's white gloves provide a nice contrast to his bright-red suit, but they won't do for the tablet era. Who wants to have to take off their gloves to use a touch screen or open an app? Dutch designer label Mujjo sells a line of touch-screen gloves that register on smartphones and tablet screens just fine. There's even a double-layered gloves for chilly climates like the North Pole, and the gloves are super-stretchy, so the aforementioned chubby fingers shouldn't be an issue. These gloves would ensure that if Santa were to drop his stylus from the sleigh midair, he'd still be able to access his list and directions.

4. GPS capabilities

Rudolph, with his nose so bright, may do just fine at keeping Santa's sleigh on course. But a little backup couldn't hurt. Santa needs to take advantage of the global positioning system (GPS).

GPS has been around since 1995 and is now so ubiquitous in phones and cars as to be taken for granted. Originally a military project, GPS uses satellites positioned in orbit that transmit periodic messages with the time and their location to Earth. GPS receivers on the planet's surface capture and triangulate these space-based messages in order to pinpoint location.

An emerging line of GPS trackers can even help Mrs. Claus keep an eye on her husband. These devices can show where someone is and where they've been. Perfect for Christmas Command Headquarters.

5. Protective gear

One disadvantage to entering the digital age is that most tech gadgets aren't built for the cold. Apple recommends operating its devices only between 32 degrees and 95 degrees Fahrenheit (0 degrees and 35 degrees Celsius).

What's an Arctic-based elf to do? A Kickstarter-funded company has a possible answer. Salt Cases uses NASA-developed materials that protect spacecraft from the chill of space and the heat of a launch to keep smartphones, laptops and tablets cozy. The thermal layers in the cases refract heat away when it's hot and reflect warmth into the device when it's cold. The company even offers appropriately Christmasy red cases.

Italy Delays 'Google Tax' Until July

Italy delayed the start of its planned Internet tax until July 2014, approved billions of euros in business and welfare measures and extended a ban on media cross-ownership in a final package of year-end legislation approved on Friday.

The launch of an Internet tax, sometimes dubbed the "Google tax", passed this week by parliament, will be postponed until July, 1, 2014, Prime Minister Enrico Letta's office said in a statement. The delay should ensure it can be more closely coordinated with other European countries.

The tax, designed to ensure that companies that advertise and sell online in Italy do so only through companies with a tax presence in the country,

has been criticized by the European Commission, which expressed doubts on its legality before it was approved in parliament.

The delay was contained in the so-called "Milleproroghe" ("thousand extensions"), a catch-all decree used by Italian governments to pack in miscellaneous pieces of legislation that must be approved before the start of the new year.

The package announced after Friday's cabinet meeting included measures to allow Italy to use 6.2 billion euros in European Union funds, which have already been approved, to help small businesses, fight youth unemployment and help local economies by funding the maintenance of historic sites.

It also extended provisions, which would have otherwise expired, forbidding newspaper publishers from operating national broadcasters. This is a highly sensitive political issue given center-right leader Silvio Berlusconi's extensive television interests.

The package also contained measures to shore up the finances of the city of Rome and allow the cancellation of a number of expensive rental contracts on buildings used by parliament and the public service, an issue on which the government has been attacked by the opposition 5-Star Movement.

Anti-porn Politician's Website Blocked by Porn Filters She Advocated

As was predicted by just about everyone, the United Kingdom's initiative to get U.K. ISPs to add default pornography filters has been a complete and utter disaster so far. Not only have the filters been blocking access to pornographic content but they've also been blocking access to health information websites and charity websites among other unintended targets.

There is some justice to come out of all this, however: The Independent reports that the filters have also blocked access to the website of Conservative MP Claire Perry, who has been one of the leading crusaders for implementing porn filters in the U.K. It seems that Perry's website contained information on her assorted anti-pornography campaigns, which was apparently enough to get her site caught in the porn filter dragnet.

Although many Britons will be happy to see the government scrap its porn filter plans, we can also imagine them petitioning to keep the block on Perry's website upheld for the foreseeable future.

Bitcoin Alternative 'Dogecoin' Hacked, 21 Million Coins Stolen

Take two of 2013's biggest Internet sensations - bitcoins and the Shiba Inu puppy nicknamed "Doge" - and smash them together. What you get is Dogecoin, a virtual currency that was hacked during the holidays.

Although 21 million dogecoins were lost in the heist, they only amounted to about \$12,000 in value. In comparison, bitcoins are now valued at close to \$750 a piece, and a bitcoin hack in November lost 4,100 bitcoins, totaling \$1.2 million.

The hack caught Jackson Palmer, a co-founder of the currency, by surprise. "It's interesting that there has been a focus [on dogecoins] in the short two or three weeks we've been up and running," he said. "I think it's crazy that it can happen, but maybe these hackers are trying to get in early."

He and the other co-founder of Dogecoin, Billy Markus, are looking to beef up security in the next month, Palmer added.

Even though the idea of dogecoins started as a joke, Palmer said, it has grown in popularity. "For the majority of their people, it's their first experience with cryptocurrency," he told ABC News. "It's a lot more accessible and the majority of people are having a lot of fun with it."

A single dogecoin might only be worth a fraction of a penny, but Palmer does see it being useful as a currency, though maybe not in the real world.

"People are trading coins for small purchases, like in an online game where you can purchase a different set of armor," he said. "I think that's a really good place [for Dogecoin]."

Rap Genius Website Banished for Trying To Game Google

Whether you were preparing for your bar's karaoke night or settling a bet about the exact words to "Like a Rolling Stone," you've likely stumbled across lyrics websites in your Google search results.

One of those websites, Rap Genius, was caught trying to pull a fast one to appear more prominently in searches. As a result, Rap Genius has been vanquished to the Google underbelly. Searching for the phrase "Rap Genius" won't bring up the website until the fifth page of a search.

A recent email published by blogger John Marbach appears to be the origin of Rap Genius' woes. Marbach asked about blogging opportunities with Rap Genius and received an email from one of the site's co-founders, Mahbod Moghadam. According to the email, Rap Genius would promote Marbach's posts so long they included several links back to Rap Genius pages devoted to Justin Bieber songs, even if Marbach's post had nothing to do with the pop star.

After Marbach posted the email on his own website, it became popular on Hacker News, where it caught the attention of Matt Cutts, the head of Google's Webspam team. The search engine's linking policy says that "creating links that weren't editorially placed or vouched for by the site's owner on a page ... can be considered a violation of our guidelines."

As a result, Google came down on Rap Genius and banished it to Internet limbo.

Rap Genius admitted its mistake. "This is where we messed up," wrote the Rap Genius founders in an open letter of apology to Google on the Rap Genius website. "In some instances, we have fallen short in terms of making sure that the links people post are natural."

But Rap Genius said that other lyrics websites have also violated

Google's linking policy. "With limited tools, we found suspicious backlinks to some of our competitors," said the founders. "We'd love for Google to take a closer look at the whole lyrics search landscape and see whether it can make changes that would improve lyric search results."

Bye Bye, Bile? Websites Try To Nix Nasty Comments

Mix blatant bigotry with poor spelling. Add a dash of ALL CAPS. Top it off with a violent threat. And there you have it: A recipe for the worst of online comments, scourge of the Internet.

Blame anonymity, blame politicians, blame human nature. But a growing number of websites are reining in the Wild West of online commentary. Companies including Google and the Huffington Post are trying everything from deploying moderators to forcing people to use their real names in order to restore civil discourse. Some sites, such as Popular Science, are banning comments altogether.

The efforts put sites in a delicate position. User comments add a lively, fresh feel to videos, stories and music. And, of course, the longer visitors stay to read the posts, and the more they come back, the more a site can charge for advertising.

What websites don't want is the kind of off-putting nastiness that spewed forth under a recent CNN.com article about the Affordable Care Act.

"If it were up to me, you progressive libs destroying this country would be hanging from the gallows for treason. People are awakening though. If I were you, I'd be very afraid," wrote someone using the name "JBlaze."

YouTube, which is owned by Google, has long been home to some of the Internet's most juvenile and grammatically incorrect comments. The site caused a stir last month when it began requiring people to log into Google Plus to write a comment. Besides herding users to Google's unified network, the company says the move is designed to raise the level of discourse in the conversations that play out under YouTube videos.

One such video, a Cheerios commercial featuring an interracial family, met with such a barrage of racist responses on YouTube in May that General Mills shut down comments on it altogether.

"Starting this week, when you're watching a video on YouTube, you'll see comments sorted by people you care about first," wrote YouTube product manager Nundu Janakiram and principal engineer Yonatan Zunger in a blog post announcing the changes. "If you post videos on your channel, you also have more tools to moderate welcome and unwelcome conversations. This way, YouTube comments will become conversations that matter to you."

Anonymity has always been a major appeal of online life. Two decades ago, The New Yorker magazine ran a cartoon with a dog sitting in front of a computer, one paw on the keyboard. The caption read: "On the Internet, nobody knows you're a dog." At its best, anonymity allows people to speak freely without repercussions. It allows whistle blowers and protesters to espouse unpopular opinions. At its worst, it allows people to spout off without repercussions. It gives trolls and bullies license to pick arguments, threaten and abuse.

But anonymity has been eroding in recent years. On the Internet, many people may know not only your name, but also your latest musings, the songs you've listened to, your job history, who your friends are and even the brand of soap you prefer.

"It's not so much that our offline lives are going online, it's that our offline and online lives are more integrated," says Mark Lashley, a professor of communications at La Salle University in Philadelphia. Facebook, which requires people to use their real names, played a big part in the seismic shift.

"The way the Web was developed, it was unique in that the avatar and the handle were always these things people used to go by. It did develop into a Wild West situation," he says, adding that it's no surprise that Google and other companies are going this route. "As more people go online and we put more of our lives online, we should be held accountable for things we say."

Nearly three-quarters of teens and young adults think people are more likely to use discriminatory language online or in text messages than in face to face conversations, according to a recent poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research and MTV. The poll didn't distinguish between anonymous comments and those with real identities attached.

The Huffington Post is also clamping down on vicious comments. In addition to employing 40 human moderators who sift through readers' posts for racism, homophobia, hate speech and the like, the AOL-owned news site is also chipping away at anonymous commenting. Previously, anyone could respond to an article posted on the site by creating an account, without tying it to an email address. This fall, HuffPo began requiring people to verify their identity by connecting their accounts to an email address, but that didn't appear to be enough and the site now also asks commenters to log in using a verified Facebook account.

"We are reaching a place where the Internet is growing up," says Jimmy Soni, managing editor of HuffPo. "These changes represent a maturing (online) environment."

Soni says the changes have already made a difference in the quality of the comments. The lack of total anonymity, while not a failsafe method, offers people a "gut check moment," he says. There have been "significantly fewer things that we would not be able to share with our mothers," in the HuffPo comments section since the change, Soni says.

Newspapers are also turning toward regulated comments. Of the largest 137 U.S. newspapers - those with daily circulation above 50,000 - nearly 49 percent ban anonymous commenting, according to Arthur Santana, assistant communications professor at the University of Houston. Nearly 42 percent allow anonymity, while 9 percent do not have comments at all.

Curbing anonymity doesn't always help. Plenty of people are fine attaching their names and Facebook profiles to poorly spelled outbursts that live on long after their fury has passed.

In some cases, sites have gone further. Popular Science, the 141-year-old science and technology magazine, stopped allowing comments of any kind on its news articles in September.

While highlighting responses to articles about climate change and abortion, Popular Science online editor Suzanne LaBarre announced the change and explained in a blog post that comments can be "bad for science."

Because "comments sections tend to be a grotesque reflection of the media culture surrounding them, the cynical work of undermining bedrock scientific doctrine is now being done beneath our own stories," wrote LaBarre.

We can't wait to see the response to this story.

Former Interns Give Us An Inside Look at What It's Like To Work at Google

Google's internship program is one of the most sought-after and widely discussed in the United States, so it's no wonder that Hollywood deemed the experience worthy of an overblown film adaptation. Although the interns admit that their internships weren't quite as eventful as Owen Wilson's time with Google in the movie, they have shared their experiences on Quora, discussing everything from the hefty paychecks to the internal structure of the search giant.

Business Insider has picked through the thread to share the most interesting tidbits. One of the key components to an internship with Apple is the secrecy, but at Google, things are a little different.

The open office also mirrors how open the company is internally, said former intern Molly Long. There are quite literally, no secrets. There's TGIF/TGIT every Thursday where Larry and Sergey, the founders, answer company-wide questions, broadcasted to the entire company. They present the new Google technologies so they can get feedback on it from everyone. For example, Google Glass, was presented at TGIF, several months before it was announced [to the] public.

Google has high hopes for everyone that works at its offices, and the company expects the interns to make themselves heard. When you start your internship with Google, you are assigned to a product area and a team within that area. If it doesn't suit you, you can decline the offer and have the opportunity to work with another team instead.

Working with the most talked-about company around the globe is a reward of its own, but that doesn't mean there aren't plenty of perks to go along with a Google internship.

One thing that makes Google internships special is the perks you get just as any other Google employee, said Paul Baltescu, an intern from 2010-2011. [There's] free food & refreshments, free gym membership, laundry, dancing lessons, etc. Intern events are also loads of fun: you may go to paintball, laser tag, watch a SF Giants game and all summer interns go on a luxury boat trip on the San Francisco Bay.

Designing the most widely used applications and services in the world is certainly a Herculean task, but between the trust, the perks, and, oh yeah, the average wage of \$6,700 per month, you can't go wrong with an internship at Google.

Tablets A Hit With Kids, But Experts Worry

Tablet computers are so easy to use that even a 3-year-old can master them.

And that has some pediatricians and other health experts worried.

Since navigating a tablet generally doesn't require the ability to type or read, children as young as toddlers can quickly learn how to stream movies, scroll through family photos or play simple games.

That ease-of-use makes tablets and smartphones popular with busy parents who use them to pacify their kids during car rides, restaurant outings or while they're at home trying to get dinner on the table. And many feel a little less guilty about it if they think there's educational value to the apps and games their children use.

The devices are expected to rank among the top holiday gifts for children this year. Gadget makers such as Samsung have introduced tablets specifically designed for kids and many manufacturers of adult tablets now include parental controls. Those products are in addition to the slew of kiddie tablets produced by electronic toy makers such as LeapFrog, Vtech and Toys R Us.

But some experts note there's no evidence that screen time whether from a TV or tablet provides any educational or developmental benefits for babies and toddlers. Yet it takes away from activities that do promote brain development, such as non-electronic toys and adult interaction.

They also say that too much screen time has been linked to behavior problems and delayed social development in older children.

Dr. Dimitri Christakis, a pediatrician at Seattle Children's Hospital, points out that iPads have only been on the market for a little over three years, which means tablet-related research is still in its infancy.

Christakis says educational games and apps have some value if they engage a child and prompt them to interact with the device, but cautioned that if all children do is watch videos on their tablets, then it's just like watching TV, which has a limited ability to engage a child.

He also notes that parents need be mindful of whether tablet time is replacing more important activities such as sleeping, reading or interacting with adults. He says that while the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no more than one to two hours of screen time a day for kids over the age of two, he thinks one hour is plenty.

"The single most important thing for children is time with parents and caregivers," he says. "Nothing is more important in terms of social development. If time with the tablet comes at the expense of that, that's not good."

Dr. Rahil Briggs, a pediatric psychologist at New York's Montefiore Medical Center, says tablet usage needs to be limited for the youngest of children, because too much screen time can slow language development. And since there's very little research out there so far, experts still don't know exactly how much is too much, she says.

For older children, Briggs says too much tablet use can slow social development. She notes that the solitary nature of the activity means that kids aren't using that time to learn how to make friends or pick up on social cues.

Some experts, however, believe tablets and smartphones possess unique educational benefits.

Jill Buban, dean of the School of Education at Post University in Waterbury Conn., says the more children absorb and understand technology before they start school, the more comfortable they'll feel when they enter a classroom for the first time.

But she says even the best educational apps must be monitored by parents and limited. She recommends no more than 30 minutes of tablet usage at a time in light of the short attention spans of most young kids.

"There's so much media out there and so much marketing," she says. "It's all about smart choices and research, whether it's an app on a tablet or a TV show."

Susan Linn, director of the Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood, says parents should be wary of any TV show or app that touts educational benefits for babies or toddlers, saying that scientists have yet to prove that there are any.

"Babies and young children are spending huge amounts of time with screen media when really what they need is hands-on creative play, active time and face-to face time with the people that love them," Linn said.

Linn's group, known for its allegations against "Baby Einstein" videos that eventually led to consumer refunds, is urging the Federal Trade Commission to examine the marketing practices of certain apps and games geared toward babies.

"The best toys are the ones that just lie there until the child transforms them," Linn said pointing to blocks and stuffed animals as examples. "If all children do is push a button, that's not the kind of play that promotes learning."

Since its debut over 40 years ago, Sesame Street has dealt with questions about the amount of screen time small children should have.

Scott Chambers, Sesame Workshop's senior vice president for digital content, says the brand, which now includes 45 apps and 160 e-books, has gotten a huge boost from touch screen devices, which are much easier for preschoolers to handle than computer mice. That content can provide children with a much more customized and interactive educational experience than the show could hope to deliver, he says.

"It's a balancing act, but all we can do is try to provide a good enriching media experience wherever parents and preschoolers may be," Chambers says.

Chambers notes that some of Sesame's apps encourage kids to put down their devices, pointing to Sesame's new "Family Play" app. Instead of having a child interact directly with a phone or tablet, it gives parents ideas for ways to play together.

Adam Cohen, a stay-at-home father of two from New York, says apps have

been a key part of his 5-year-old son Marc's education since he was just a baby.

"He had an iPad at close to 18 months so he was definitely one of those babies swiping away in his stroller," Cohen says. "Now it's different, but back then we were a little ostracized. Now he's reading at close to a second-grade reading level and I credit a lot of that to iPad apps."

Marc now has his own iPad loaded with mostly educational content and his baby sister Harper, who isn't yet one-year-old, seems frustrated that she doesn't have one too, Cohen says.

Still, not every parent is keen on tablets and apps.

Lance Somerfeld, another stay-at-home dad from New York, says he thinks he and his wife are stricter than most parents. They don't own a tablet and didn't allow their 5-year-old son Jake to watch TV until he was nearly three. But Somerfeld says he does have an iPhone and lets Jake occasionally play with some of the apps.

"If I have an hour and a choice, I'd really rather spend it reading books with him," Somerfeld says. "But he's really engaged by the apps, so you could make the case that there needs to be a balance."

Memory Trick Increases Password Security

Passwords have steadfastly remained the primary way we prove our identity to the many Web sites and apps that have become integral to daily life. Despite years of predictions that passwords would eventually be phased out in favor of more secure approaches to authentication, such as biometrics, they persist because they are inexpensive and remain one of the better compromises between security and usability.

Managing dozens of passwords is even more challenging than coming up with good ones in the first place. Common sense provides some guidance when choosing them: A password should be an alphanumeric combination that a family member or friend can't guess in five tries, and it should be complex enough so a person can't figure it out by watching you type it once. That accomplished, now you just need to remember which password logs you onto which site or app.

A team of Carnegie Mellon University computer scientists is studying the possibility of employing memorization techniques and mnemonic devices to help cut through our password clutter. Their plan inspired by the Person Action Object, or PAO, method described in Joshua Foer's 2011 book *Moonwalking with Einstein* involves both generating strong passwords and a schedule for committing them to memory.

The researchers proposed shared cues system (pdf) asks you to first select a an image of an interesting place (for example, a baseball field) as well as a photo of a familiar or famous person (say, Bill Gates). You would then imagine some random action along with a random object to create a PAO story, says Jeremiah Blocki, the lead researcher. Blocki proposes, Bill Gates swallowing a bike on the baseball field.

After you create and memorize stories for several different image pairs, you would use those stories generate unique passwords. In Blocki's

example, you might take the first three letters from swallow and bike so that you associate the image pair of Gates and a baseball field with swabik. String a few image pairs together and you've got a fairly inscrutable password. If you can memorize nine sentences, the system can generate distinct passwords for 126 accounts, Blocki says.

Here's how shared cues might work in practice: You install an app developed by Blocki and his team in your browser that presents you with four image pairs whenever you visit a login screen. (A mobile version of the app would work the same way.) You recognize each image pair, and remembering the story associated with each, type in your password. A login screen for a different Web site would present a different subset of four stories from the nine that you've memorized.

If this all sounds like a lot of work, it is. The mobile version of the app, however, would serve as a coach to help you keep your stories straight. It would use the phone or tablet's notification system to randomly present you with image pairs on a regular basis so the stories you created for those pictures remain fresh in your memory. Many cognitive and educational psychologists agree that frequent quizzing is a highly effective way to activate and search long-term memory. From a usability standpoint, this practice is great as it minimizes the number of words you have to memorize and gives you more natural rehearsal, which is the more important factor, Blocki says.

As the Carnegie Mellon researchers point out, the level of security passwords can provide depends on the amount of effort users put into creating and managing them. Simply reusing passwords across multiple sites is, of course, the easiest approach to password management but poses a problem highlighted by the recent theft of tens of millions user names and passwords from Adobe. Given how easy it is to guess a person's user name for any given account often, it's their e-mail address how difficult would it be for the thieves to access other accounts secured by those same user names and passwords? Even Adobe acknowledged that people often reuse passwords and recommended that its customers change their passwords on any Web site sharing the same user ID and password as the purloined Adobe accounts.

Another barrier to complicated password programs is the temptation simply to use the reset function available on most Web sites whenever password recall remains stubbornly elusive. Password resets create security vulnerabilities, however. A 2008 Scientific American article by security specialist Herbert Thompson explains how someone could easily search the Web for all of the information they need to surreptitiously reset your password and gain access to your e-mail, Facebook, Twitter and many other accounts.

Royal Pardon for Codebreaker Alan Turing

Computer pioneer and codebreaker Alan Turing has been given a posthumous royal pardon.

It addresses his 1952 conviction for homosexuality for which he was punished by being chemically castrated.

The conviction meant he lost his security clearance and had to stop the code-cracking work that had proved vital to the Allies in World War Two.

The pardon was granted under the Royal Prerogative of Mercy after a request by Justice Minister Chris Grayling.

"Dr Alan Turing was an exceptional man with a brilliant mind," said Mr. Grayling.

He said the research Turing carried out during the war at Bletchley Park undoubtedly shortened the conflict and saved thousands of lives.

Turing's work helped accelerate Allied efforts to read German Naval messages enciphered with the Enigma machine. He also contributed some more fundamental work on codebreaking that was only released to public scrutiny in April 2012.

"His later life was overshadowed by his conviction for homosexual activity, a sentence we would now consider unjust and discriminatory and which has now been repealed," said Mr Grayling.

"Turing deserves to be remembered and recognised for his fantastic contribution to the war effort and his legacy to science. A pardon from the Queen is a fitting tribute to an exceptional man."

The pardon comes into effect on 24 December.

Turing died in June 1954 from cyanide poisoning and an inquest decided that he had committed suicide. However, biographers, friends and other students of his life dispute the finding and suggest his death was an accident.

Many people have campaigned for years to win a pardon for Turing.

Dr Sue Black, a computer scientist, was one of the key figures in the campaign.

She told the BBC that she hoped all the men convicted under the anti-homosexuality law would now be pardoned.

"This is one small step on the way to making some real positive change happen to all the people that were convicted," she said.

"It's a disgrace that so many people were treated so disrespectfully."

Some have criticised the action for not going far enough and, 59 years after Turing's death, little more than a token gesture.

"I just think it's ridiculous, frankly," British home computing pioneer Sir Clive Sinclair told the BBC.

"He's been dead these many years so what's the point? It's a silly nonsense."

"He was such a fine, great man, and what was done was appalling of course. It makes no sense to me, because what's done is done."

'It's very wrong'

Lord Sharkey, a Liberal Democrat peer who wrote a private member's bill calling for a royal pardon in July 2012, said the decision was "wonderful news".

"This has demonstrated wisdom and compassion," he said. "It has recognised a very great British hero and made some amends for the cruelty and injustice with which Turing was treated."

Vint Cerf, the computer scientist known as one of the founding fathers of the internet, also welcomed the development.

"The royal pardon for Alan Turing rights a long-standing wrong and properly honours a man whose imagination and intellect made him legendary in our field," he told the BBC.

Technology entrepreneur Mike Lynch added: "Society didn't understand Alan Turing or his ideas on many levels but that was a reflection on us, not on him - and it has taken us 60 years to catch up."

Human rights campaigner Peter Tatchell said: "I pay tribute to the government for ensuring Alan Turing has a royal pardon at last but I do think it's very wrong that other men convicted of exactly the same offence are not even being given an apology, let alone a royal pardon.

"We're talking about at least 50,000 other men who were convicted of the same offence, of so-called gross indecency, which is simply a sexual act between men with consent."

Mr Tatchell said he would like to see Turing's death fully investigated.

"While I have no evidence that he was murdered, I do think we need to explore the possibility that he may have been killed by the security services. He was regarded as a high security risk," he said.
'Not entirely comfortable'

Glyn Hughes, the sculptor of the Alan Turing Memorial in Manchester, said it was "very gratifying" that he had finally been pardoned.

"When we set out to try and make him famous - get him recognised - it was really difficult to collect money," he said.

Turing's life is the subject of upcoming Hollywood movie The Imitation Game, which focuses on the cracking of the Enigma code. Starring Sherlock actor Benedict Cumberbatch as Turing, the film is due for release next year.

And during the 2012 celebrations of the centenary of Turing's birth, a Welsh digital arts festival - the Abandon Normal Devices (AND) Festival - featured a laser image of Turing projected from Conwy Castle into the sky.

Although Turing was born in London, he had strong connections with north Wales.

The Italianate village of Portmeirion in Gwynedd was one of Turing's favourite places.

But it was in northern England where Turing spent the last six years of his life, working at Manchester University in various specialist fields including mathematical logic and philosophy.

"None of the big computer companies would stump up a penny for a memorial. They perhaps would now - we've come a very long way."

But he said he was "not entirely comfortable" that Turing had been

pardoned while thousands of other gay men had not.

"The problem is, of course, if there was a general pardon for men who had been prosecuted for homosexuality, many of them are still alive and they could get compensation."

In December 2011, an e-petition was created on the Direct Gov site that asked for Turing to be pardoned. It received more than 34,000 signatures but its request was denied by the then justice secretary, Lord McNally, who said Turing was "properly convicted" for what was at the time a criminal offence.

Prior to that in August 2009, a petition was started to request a pardon. It won an official apology from the prime minister at the time, Gordon Brown, who said the way Turing was persecuted over his homosexuality was "appalling".

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